

The Chronicles of Addington Peace

By B. FLETCHER ROBINSON

Co-author with A. Conan Doyle of "The Hound of the Baskervilles," Etc.

The Mystery of the Causeway

(Copyright, 1911, by W. G. Chapman.)

It was on Thursday, May 18, 1899, that young Sir Andrew Cheyne was found dead of a gunshot wound in the grounds of Airlie Hall, his house in Surrey.

I was myself especially interested in the case, as I was staying at a cottage within three miles of the Hall at the time. All the gossip came to us first hand. By breakfast we learned of his death. An hour later came the rumor of the murder, and the fact that an arrest had been made. A man had been caught running from the spot where the body lay.

My host was a bachelor and a brother artist. His little place was bound by no conventions. Go or come, but don't trouble to explain—such was the custom. He was busy that morning, as I knew, so I appropriated his bicycle and set off through the lanes to visit the scene of the tragedy.

Airlie Hall lay some two hundred yards back from the main road. The drive, framed in wide stretches of tuft, and flanked by a triple avenue of chestnuts, ran in a straight line from the great porch to the entrance gates of twisted iron. Peering through the bars were a dozen villagers. Within, his hand upon the lock, stood a policeman, massive, red-faced, pompous with his present importance.

"May I come in?" I asked politely.

"You may not," he said quite briefly.

I put my hand in my pocket, hesitated, and drew it out empty. It was too public a place for corruption. If Addington Peace had only been with me, I thought—and, so thinking, came by an idea.

Even a rural policeman would know the famous detective's name.

"My friend, Inspector Peace—" I began.

"Inspector who?" he interrupted. "Addington Peace of the Criminal Investigation Department. I hoped he would be here."

His manner changed with a celerity which was the greatest compliment he could have paid to the little detective.

"I beg your pardon, sir," he said. "The inspector drove up from the station not ten minutes ago. If you will inquire at the hall, you will be sure to find him."

The servant who answered my modest ring led me through a dark passage of paneled oak and out upon the terrace that lay on the farther side of the house. Below it a sloping lawn ran down to a broad lake fringed with reeds. Beyond the lake a park stretched away dotted with single oaks now struggling into foliage. It was a lovely view, unmolested by the centuries.



Within—Stood a Policeman, Massive

As it was so it had been three hundred years before, when some courtier of Elizabeth, in tightly fitting hose and immaculate ruffles, chose it as the outlook from the windows of his dining-room.

In the middle of the terrace, Addington Peace stood, smoking a cigarette and talking to a tall and stately person in a black coat, who looked every inch the man he was—the butler of a British country house.

The little inspector turned, as he heard my footsteps on the gravel, and nodded a benevolent welcome.

"A fine morning, Mr. Phillips," he said. "I did not know you were staying in the neighborhood."

"I cycled over after hearing the news. Your name opened the gates, Inspector."

"Well, I am pleased to see you, any how. Mr. Roberts here was giving me his view of this unfortunate affair. You may continue, Mr. Roberts."

The butler had been staring at me with great suspicion; but apparently he

concluded that, as a friend of a detective, I was a respectable person.

"Well, gentlemen," he said, in a soft, oily voice, as from confirmed over-eating, "my mind is, so to speak, a blank. But what I know I will say without fear or favor. Sir Andrew had not previously honored us with his presence, he having remained abroad from the death of Sir William, which was his uncle, some six months ago. Yesterday—that is, Thursday morning—he wired from London for a carriage to meet the 12:32 train. We were all in a flutter of excitement, as you can well imagine. But when he arrived it was, he said, with no intention of staying the night. During the afternoon he saw his agent on business, and afterwards went for a walk, returning about six. He dined at eight, and had his coffee served in the small library.

"The last train to London was at 10:25, and we had our orders for a carriage to be ready for him at five minutes to the hour. At ten o'clock precisely I took the liberty of entering

the small library to inform Sir Andrew that the carriage was waiting, and that there was only just time to catch the train. He was not there, and, the windows on to the terrace being open, I walked through to see if he was sitting outside, the evening being salubrious for the time of the year. It was while I was there that I heard the footsteps of some one running on the gravel, and, first thing I knew, who should appear but Jake Warner, the keeper. 'Hello, Mr. Warner,' says I, 'and where may you be going in such a hurry? Is it poachers?' I says. 'No,' says he, in a sad taking, 'but Sir Andrew's been shot—shot dead, Mr. Roberts, on the causeway to the island.' 'Heaven defend us,' I says; 'but do—'

"Quite so, Mr. Roberts," said Peace. "We understand you were much upset. So you have no idea when it was that Sir Andrew left the little library?"

"No, sir, save that it was between nine and ten."

"Thank you. And now, Mr. Phillips, I think we will go down and have a look at the causeway walk."

At the end of terrace we found a policeman waiting. He touched his helmet to the inspector, and, after a few words with him, led the way down some moss-grown steps and over a sloping lawn towards the lake. We skirted the right hand edge for perhaps two hundred yards, until we came to where a short causeway of stone had been built out into the water, joining the lawns to a shrub-grown island. The roof of a gabled cottage peeped out from the heart of its yews and laurels. The causeway, paved with great slabs of slate, was

never more than five feet broad. On either side of it was a dense growth of feathery reeds, hiding the lake behind their rustling walls.

"What cottage is that?" asked Peace, pointing a finger.

"When he was a young man, Sir William, that was Sir Andrew's uncle, used to give lunches and teas there in the summer months," said the policeman. "But the place has been shut up for a long time now, sir. No one goes to the island barring the ducks, and they nest there by the hundred."

"Where did you catch the prisoner?"

"About this very place, sir. It was about half-past nine, and I was walking down the public path, which passes the east corner of the lake, when I heard the shot. It seemed a strange time of the year for night poaching, but there are rascals in the village who wouldn't hesitate about the seasons so long as they had a duck for dinner.

"Off I raced as hard as I could put legs to the ground. When I came